

Americans can travel to Iran, and they can spend money there. The same goes for Sudan. These are countries that pose far greater threats to American interests than Cuba.

Our policy is hypocritical, inconsistent, and contrary to our values as a nation that believes in the free flow of people and ideas. It is impossible for anyone to make a rational argument that America should be able to travel freely to North Korea, or Iran, but not to Cuba. It can't be done.

We have been stuck with this absurd policy for years, even though virtually everyone knows, and says privately, that it makes absolutely no sense and is beneath the dignity of a great country.

It not only helps strengthen Fidel Castro's grip on Cuba, it hands a huge advantage to our European competitors who are building relationships and establishing a base for future investment in a post-Castro Cuba. When that will happen is anybody's guess. President Castro is no democrat, and he is not going to become one. But it is time we pursued a policy that is in our national interest.

Let me be clear. This legislation does not, I repeat does not, lift the U.S. embargo. It is narrowly worded so it does not do that. It only permits travelers to carry their personal belongings. We are not opening a floodgate for United States imports to Cuba.

The amendment limits what Americans can bring home from Cuba to the current level for government officials and other exempt categories, which is \$100.

It reaffirms the President's authority to prohibit travel in times of war, armed hostilities, or if there is imminent danger to the health or safety of Americans.

Those who want to prevent Americans from traveling to Cuba, who oppose this legislation, will argue that spending United States dollars there helps prop up the Castro Government. To some extent that is true. The government does run the economy. It also runs the schools and hospitals, maintains roads, and, like the United States Government, is responsible for the whole range of social services that benefit ordinary Cubans. Any money that goes into the Cuban economy supports those programs.

But there is also an informal economy in Cuba, because no one but the elite can survive on their meager government salary. So the income from tourism also fuels that informal sector, and it goes in to the pockets of ordinary Cubans.

It is also worth pointing out that while the average Cuban cannot survive on his or her government salary, you do not see the kind of abject poverty in Cuba that is so common elsewhere in Latin America. In Brazil, or Panama, or Mexico, or Peru, there are

children searching through garbage in the streets for scraps of food, next to gleaming high rise hotels with Mercedes limousines lined up outside.

In Cuba, almost everyone is poor. But they have access to the basics. The literacy rate is 95 percent. The life expectancy is about the same as in our country, even though the health system is very basic and focused on preventive care.

The point is that while there are obviously parts of the Cuban economy that we would prefer not to support—as there is in North Korea, China, or Sudan, or in any country whose government we disagree with, much of the Cuban Government's budget benefits ordinary Cubans. So when opponents of this legislation argue that we cannot allow Americans to travel to Cuba because the money they spend there would prop up Castro, remember what they are not saying: those same dollars also help the Cuban people.

It is also worth saying that as much as we want to see a democratic Cuba, President Castro's grip on power is not going to be weakened by keeping Americans from traveling to Cuba. History has proven that. He has been there for forty years, and as far as anyone can tell he is not going anywhere.

Mr. President, it is about time we injected some maturity into our relations with Cuba. Let's have a little more faith in the power of our ideas. Let's have the courage to admit that the cold war is over. Let's get the State Department out of the business of telling our wives, our children, and our constituents where they can travel and spend their own money—in a country that the Pentagon say poses no security threat to us.

This legislation will not end the embargo, but it will do far more to win the hearts and minds of the Cuban people than the outdated approach of those who continue to defend the status quo.

HIGH SPEED RAIL INVESTMENT ACT

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, let me begin by congratulating Senator LAUTENBERG for developing this important piece of legislation that recognizes the importance of rail in our overall transportation system as we approach the 21st Century.

I am proud to be an original cosponsor of the High Speed Rail Investment Act, which will provide Amtrak with much needed resources to pay for high speed rail corridors across the country. This legislation is crucial for the country, and for my home state of Massachusetts, and I am hopeful we can move it quickly through Congress.

This bill will give Amtrak the authority to sell \$10 billion in bonds over the next ten years to finance high speed rail. Instead of interest pay-

ments, the federal government would provide tax credits to bondholders. Amtrak would repay the principle on the bonds after 10 years, however, the payments would come primarily from required state matching funds. I know many states will gladly participate in this matching program, as their governors and state legislatures are eager to promote high speed rail. Amtrak would be authorized to invest this money solely for upgrading existing lines to high speed rail, constructing new high speed rail lines, purchasing high speed rail equipment, eliminating or improving grade crossings, and for capital upgrades to existing high speed rail corridors.

Let there be no mistake, this country needs to develop a comprehensive national transportation policy for the 21st Century. So far, Congress has failed to address this vital issue. What we have is an ad hoc, disjointed policy that focuses on roads and air to the detriment of rail. We need to look at all of these modes of transportation to alleviate congestion and delays on the ground and in the sky and to move people across this country efficiently. Failing to do this will hamper economic growth and harm the environment.

Despite rail's proven safety, efficiency and reliability in Europe and Japan, and also in the Northeast corridor here in the U.S., passenger rail is severely underfunded. We need to include rail into the transportation mix. We need more transportation choices and this bill helps to provide them.

In the Northeast corridor, Amtrak is well on its way to implementing high speed rail service. The high speed Acela service should start running from in January. This will be extremely helpful in my home state of Massachusetts, where airport and highway congestion often reach frustrating levels. The more miles that are traveled on Amtrak, the fewer trips taken on crowded highways and skyways.

But new service in the Northeast corridor is only the beginning. We need to establish rail as a primary mode of transportation along with air and highways. This bill will help us achieve that goal across the country and I am proud to be an original cosponsor of such an important piece of legislation.

THE TERROR OF GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, the call to end gun violence has become all too commonplace during this session of Congress. It seems as if each day, another one of us comes to the floor to express our outrage. Last week, it was about workplace violence in Honolulu and Seattle—a total of nine dead. In September it was a church shooting in Texas—a total of seven dead. In August, gun shots were fired in a Jewish Community Center in Los Angeles—